

THE PROVENCE GURU JAMIE IVEY

BY CAROLYNE KAUSER-ABBOTT

His bride pondered whether it was too late. Seemingly out of the blue, Jamie Ivey wanted to become a writer, and career change was the topic of discussion during their sand- and surf-based honeymoon. Thankless legal deals and long hours focused on corporate mergers “did not appeal as a way to live the rest of my life,” Jamie said.

His book proposal, based on a plot about selling local wine in French markets, was accepted. That was the catalyst to pull up roots in the United Kingdom, give up a legal career, and embark on a dream of living in Provence. Then reality hit, and Jamie admits he and his wife, Tanya, may have been a bit wide-eyed innocent and perhaps not wholly prepared for what lay ahead.

Fast-forward eight years and Jamie has published four books and plans for a fifth in the next few years. His books are based on actual encounters and episodes from this couple’s life as they established a young family in Provence. According to Jamie, the region has too serious of a feel with travel magazines and guidebooks spilling lavender-scented descriptions all over their pages. With his books, *Rosé en Marché*, *La Vie en Rosé*, *Extremely Pale Rosé*, and *Ten Trees and a Truffle Dog*, Jamie takes a more playful viewpoint of being a foreigner living in Provence.

Entrenched near Lourmarin commune in southeastern France, Jamie admits that finding their home was a chance encounter, as only by fluke did the real estate agents, from another village, have an available property. At first they rented, which Jamie describes as a classic expat experience since the landlord simply would not accept that they were credit-worthy.

“We lacked the normal three years of bank accounts and credit references, which all French renters have to present. In the end, we begged and paid double the usual deposit.” The couple subsequently went on to build a house, a challenging chapter in their lives that Jamie says they will not repeat.

Jamie and Tanya eventually entered the profitable, yet seasonal, wine business. According to Jamie, “We bought most of our wine at four Euros a bottle and sold it for around nine. On a good day in the summer we could sell over a hundred bottles; the problem was that on a bad day in the winter we might not sell any!”

Then there was the idea of a rosé bar. They decided to test the concept by renting half the terrace of a bar in Aix-en-Provence for the summer. However, the best-laid rosé plans did not pan out as the shifty bar owner reneged on the agreement before the first glass of wine was poured. Jamie describes that summer as “a traveling rosé festival, hiring space on bar terraces for short periods of time to sell wine. It ended up being great fun, moving along the coast, selling wine and drinking the leftovers!” Despite the fun, Jamie says the wine chapter of their lives is now done.

Provence Guru, Jamie’s latest project, is an interactive portal showcasing Tanya’s photography and featuring articles, restaurant reviews, recipes, and more. Jamie says Provence Guru is also about great writing with “plenty of humor” and a way to “expose some of the myths behind the supposed ‘Paradise’ that is Provence.” The audience is anyone who lives in Provence and visitors who dream of moving there. Jamie’s website has a section focused on property sales and rentals. He is working with Home Hunts in the Luberon and hopes to enter into an exclusive arrangement with a villa company shortly. His plan is to continue to evolve Provence Guru with partners and guest writers.

Jamie describes their early days in France as almost dreamlike. He says their first year in Provence was like being at a never-ending theme park full of festivals and events. His favorite is still the Feast of Potato Festival held by local Pertuis farmers each September. After several years in the region and a variety of work experiences, when asked if he feels like he has shed the expat moniker, Jamie



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responded, “Never. I have probably become more French in my behavior – I can talk about food for hours on end – but a real local? No!”

Though Jamie admits he misses the odd curry dish, he says that the inhabitants of Lourmarin have been welcoming and open-minded. Even when he proposed a *boules* tournament through a vineyard, the villagers participated, and it was a great success despite initial skepticism.

Though Jamie admits that expat living can be challenging at times, he is clear that life is not always easy *anywhere*. He says as an expat you need to be comfortable with a continuous sense of being an outsider, which is not always easy for some who crave inclusion in social groups. Overall, however, he views expat living as refreshing and, after close to a decade in Provence, the Ivey’s are happily settled into their French lifestyle.

For more on Jamie’s life in Provence, visit www.provenceguru.com. Jamie’s books can be found on Amazon. ■